

GAP Analysis in Expectations of Industry – Institute from Professional Education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

In Saudi Arabia, education sector is at boom. According to 2013 budget report (SAMA), 33% revenue has been spent on education sector and it is growing every year. However (according to IMF) it is really shocking to know that the unemployment rate in Saudi Arabia is still around 10%. It is observed that there is a mismatch in the expectations of labor market and the outcome of professional education. It is the responsibility of educational institution to ensure that the student graduating must possess the employability skills as required by the labor market. For this, there is a need to map employability skills in the curriculum.

This paper tries to understand the view of Industry-Institute on current professional education in Saudi Arabia. The research involves a literature review and an Ex-post-facto research is undertaken. Questionnaire and interview are used as research instrument to collect the data from industry-institute people working at managerial level. The research helps to determine the important skill sets for increasing the performance of professional education. The finding also disclose that there is a gap between the industry-institute expectations and suggest some guidelines for better collaboration for curriculum planning, design, implementation and monitoring.

The purpose of this paper is to engage all concerned in a serious discussion with a view to revamping professional education. It is the combined responsibility of Government, public & private sector and educators to put professional education on a new growth trajectory.

Keywords: Professional Education, Employability Skills, Curriculum, Curriculum development, GAP Analysis, etc.

1. Research Background

It is evident that the value of professional education is enormous for individuals, organizations and society. In today's modern era, professional education directly influences the effectiveness of organization. An institute or university cannot function in isolation and the same applies to industry as well. They are the important stakeholders for the performance of professional programs.

It is essential to understand the basic link between business, the environment and society in the present competitive world. The roles and responsibilities of business as a global force are becoming more urgent and complex. Globalization has given professional education an increasingly important role in the success of individuals and organizations. Professional education has spread in the last ten years in Saudi Arabia. For the year 2012, total expenditure is budgeted at SR690 billion. As in previous years, education and training have received the largest share, at 24 percent of total spending or \$44.1 billion (SR165 billion). We all know Saudi economy is an oil based economy. But, for last few years, the contribution of oil export in total revenue is reducing and the contribution of other industries is increasing. The other industries include hotels, communication, infrastructure, healthcare, transport, etc. As it is a developing economy, many such industries are attracted towards it and are doing exceptionally good. These industries demand highly skilled professionals in diversified fields.

According to 2013 budget report (SAMA), 33% revenue has been spent on education sector and it is growing every year. However (according to IMF) it is really shocking to know that the unemployment rate in Saudi Arabia is still around 10%.

According to the available literature, it is observed that there is a mismatch in the expectations of labor market and the outcome of professional education. It is the responsibility of educational institution to ensure that the student graduating must possess the employability skills as required by the labor market. For this, there is a need to map employability skills in the curriculum.

2. Literature Review

Education is normally the acquiring of knowledge as well as the skills that are accepted by a given society. On the other hand, nation-building is the implementation of processes that are geared towards recomposing the nation's institutions so that they can reflect the wishes, needs and aspirations of the wider society.

A nation cannot be built without education. With education, professionals are nurtured that will enhance nation-building. In the same way, education leads to efficient usage of a nation's resources which in turn is very crucial to nation-building because without efficient usage of a nation's resources, nation-building will not be successful. This is evident in the developed nations. To continue to build their nations, they educate their citizens, because education shapes the attitudes and behaviors and values of citizens. These are qualities that are needed for nation-building and it is only education that will bring those mechanics.[1]

Professional courses are the education or curriculum designed, keeping in mind the need of a particular industry, courses like this are very focused and future oriented. Professional courses have gained importance in the recent years, with the graph going high for job opportunities in the respective sectors. A professional course helps students to get trained and aware of the latest trends in the market and the respective work environments. These courses can be in the form of degree or diploma certificates depending upon their curriculum and the time period.[6]

Education clearly is a driver of better productivity giving rise to a higher competitive ability and hence more jobs and higher economic growth rates which enables more money to be invested in, for instance, better education. It is a virtuous circle.

The success of Higher Technical Education in developed countries like the US, Canada, UK and others can be attributed to the close collaboration between citadels of learning and industry. This opens up many avenues and it is a win, win situation for the good of both and the country too.

Peyton and Peyton note that the curricular cycle “involves development through needs assessment, design and implementation phases (Fig. 1). After this, outcomes are reviewed and evaluated against the original needs assessment. Needs change with societal expectations. The emphasis on different aspects varies with the participants’ and teachers’ perceived needs. The dynamic curriculum requires change and resource management”.

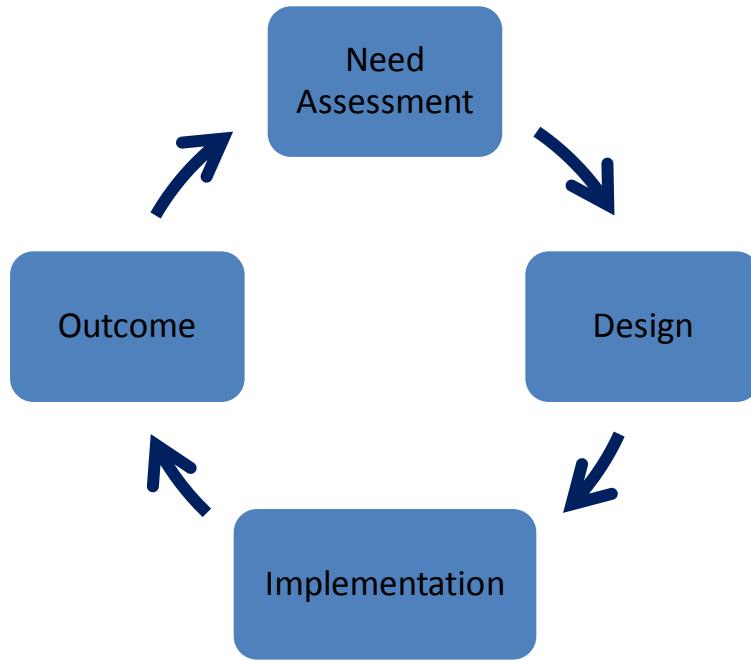


Figure 1: Curricular Cycle

According to a research published by Al-Arabiya News on unemployment, one of the causes of the unemployment problem in Saudi Arabia is education system. The education system is failing to equip young Saudis with the right skills. The young Saudis are not studying the courses the society needs most. The existing programs are not covered by the needs of labor market. The population of fresh graduates is increasing every year, but most of them are struggling to find a job in the market. They lack employability skills. Indeed, there is mismatch between the number of skilled graduates from public and higher education institutions and the needs of the labor market. Professional education, at this juncture, needs a critical examination as only developing talent can take Saudi Arabia forward.

Considering the above mentioned literature following **research objectives** were set:

1. To find out the views of industry and academia on current professional education system in Saudi Arabia
2. To identify the major skill sets required for employability in Saudi Arabia
3. To analyze the gap in the expectations of Industry and institute from professional education

4. Research Methodology

A comprehensive literature study was performed to find the relevance of the stated research questions. The literature study was performed to identify areas to be investigated in the target and study populations. An ex-post-facto (non-experimental) research was undertaken in the field of professional education.

3.1 Data Collection Tool: Questionnaire Technique & Interview Technique were used to collect the opinion of Industry-Institute professionals on professional education in Saudi Arabia.

The questionnaire consists of two sections. Section A includes questions related to the employability skills in Saudi Arabia and section B includes respondent profile related questions. The questionnaire was piloted and corrected, after which the questionnaires were distributed to and collected from respondents, mostly by email.

3.2 Survey Location: Kingdom of Saudi Arabia – divided into four provinces Riyadh, Dammam, Jeddah and the Rest as most of the universities and industries are located here.

3.3 Sample Size: 300 (Industry + Institute)

Summary: Out of 300 respondents, 188 filled it completely and send it back resulting in 63% response rate.

3.4 Statistical Analysis and Interpretation

Data collected from questionnaires was analyzed according to descriptive analytical statistics. Frequency analysis of biographical data was conducted. Tests on reliability (Cronbach Alpha) and validity (factor analysis) were done using STATA software and Ms-Excel 2010. D-values of Cohen [4] were used to indicate whether there were any significant differences between the responses of the study populations. The results were found to be within the range and were considered satisfactory.

3.4.1 Section D: Respondent Profile Analysis

Respondents profile was collected from industry experts and heads of academic departments of professional education institutions with regard to their job profile, gender, education level, experience and type of organization.

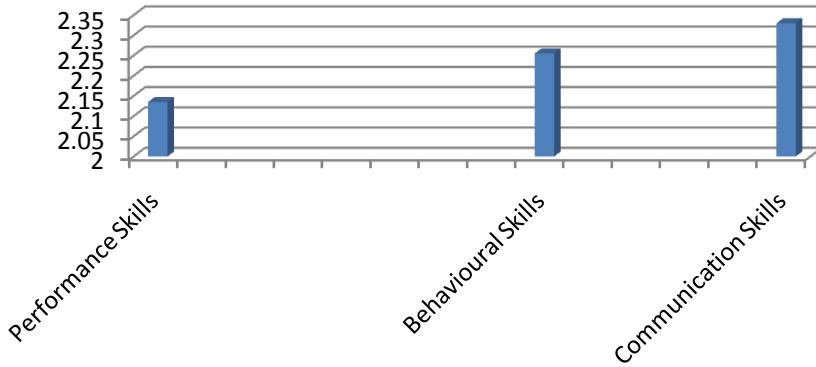
The majorities of the respondents were either from government or public sector, predominantly male, held the position at middle level manager and had ten or more years of work experience. The majority of the respondents were from industry having degree or master and from institute having doctorate or master as their highest qualification.

The similarity of the profiles of the two groups is noted with interest. Males dominate industry and institutions in the posts described. This was because females were not very keen to work outside in Saudi Arabia. The level of qualifications in higher education institutions is much higher than those in industry, probably since it is a requirement in institutions as compared to industry.

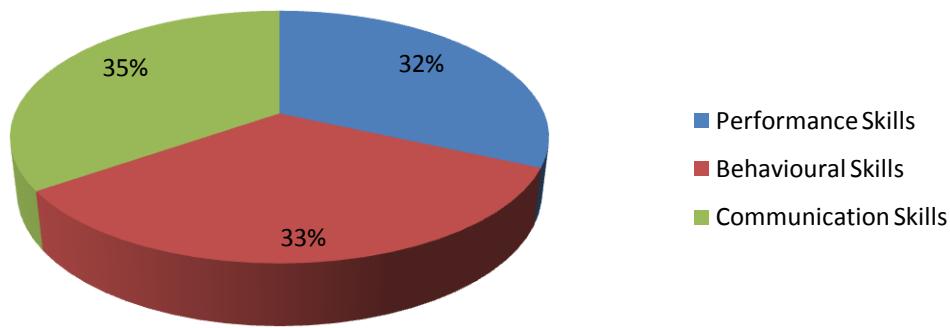
3.4.2 Aim: To identify the major skill sets required for employability in Saudi Arabia

Data Collection Tools: Questionnaire Technique. The Employability skill sets were divided into three heads – 1) Performance Skills 2) Behavioral Skills and 3) Communication Skills.

Graph 1: Employability Skills Group Difference



Graph 2: Employability Skill Sets Requirement



From the above graphs, it is clear that the stakeholders feel that communication skill set is the area which is most important followed by behavioral skill set and performance skill set.

Conclusion:

While introducing new or revising an existing professional program in Saudi Arabia, the above skill sets should be mapped in the curriculum.

3.4.3 Section A : Gap Analysis of Industry-Institute Expectations from Professional Education in the Kingdom Of Saudi Arabia

Respondents were asked to rate on A- how important the activity is to the successful performance of the job and B- how well your employees currently perform that activity on a scale of 1-7 where for A: 1-Not at all important to 7-very important and for B: 1-Not Well to 7: Very Well.

The following table 1 show the mean difference and standard deviation for the views collected from the respondents. D-values of Cohen [4] were used to indicate whether there were any significant differences between the responses of the industry experts and the academicians.

Formula

$$d = (\text{Mean}(X) - \text{Mean}(Y)) / \text{maximum SD}$$

Where SD = Standard deviation.

The effect sizes were determined according to the following criteria[4]:

Small effect size: $d = 0.2$, Medium effect size: $d = 0.5$ and Large effect size: $d = 0.8$

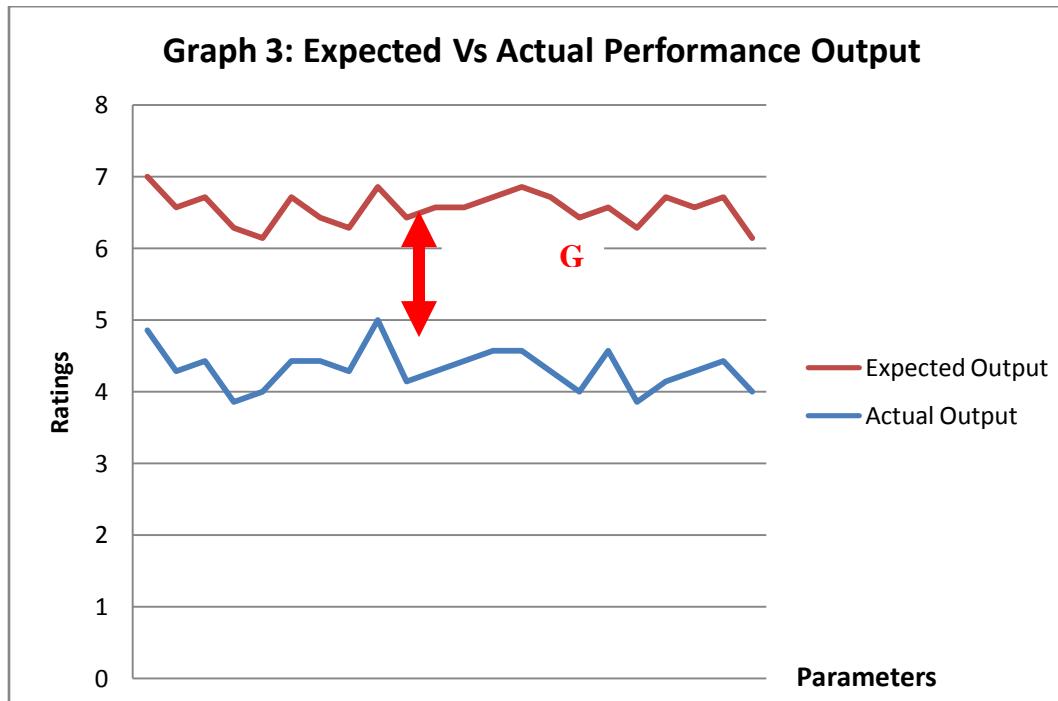
Table 1: Gap Analysis

| Parameters | Industry | | Academia | | D-Value |
|---|----------|--------------------|----------|--------------------|---------|
| | Mean(X) | Standard Deviation | Mean(Y) | Standard Deviation | |
| Performance Skills | | | | | |
| Job Knowledge | 2.143 | 0.69 | .50 | 0.52 | 0.52 |
| Skills and Abilities | 2.286 | 0.49 | .25 | 0.62 | 0.06 |
| Decision Making Capacity | 2.286 | 0.49 | .42 | 0.67 | 0.20 |
| Priority Setting | 2.429 | 0.53 | .25 | 0.62 | 0.29 |
| Adjustment to Changing work assignments | 2.143 | 0.69 | .92 | 0.67 | 0.33 |
| Goal Achievement Capacity | 2.286 | 0.49 | .25 | 0.62 | 0.06 |
| Planning & Implementation | 2.000 | 0.58 | .67 | 0.98 | 0.34 |
| Report Writing | 2.000 | 0.58 | .92 | 0.79 | 0.11 |
| Application of Information & Communication Technology | 1.857 | 0.69 | .83 | 0.72 | 0.03 |
| Behavioral Skills | | | | | |
| Initiative | 2.286 | 0.76 | 2.67 | 0.89 | 0.43 |
| Leadership Quality | 2.286 | 0.49 | 2.42 | 0.67 | 0.20 |
| Dependability | 2.143 | 0.69 | 2.17 | 0.83 | 0.03 |
| Market Knowledge | 2.143 | 0.69 | 2.08 | 0.67 | 0.09 |
| Teamwork | 2.286 | 0.49 | 2.33 | 0.78 | 0.06 |
| Attitude | 2.429 | 0.79 | 2.17 | 0.83 | 0.31 |
| Belongingness | 2.429 | 0.98 | 2.42 | 0.67 | 0.01 |
| Learning aptitude | 2.000 | 0.82 | 1.83 | 0.72 | 0.20 |
| Communication Skills | | | | | |
| Written Communication | 2.429 | 0.79 | .50 | 0.90 | 0.08 |
| Oral Communication | 2.571 | 0.79 | .67 | 0.89 | 0.11 |
| Interaction with colleagues | 2.286 | 0.76 | .50 | 0.52 | 0.28 |
| Listening skills | 2.286 | 0.49 | .92 | 0.79 | 0.47 |
| Computer Proficiency | 2.143 | 0.90 | .00 | 0.85 | 0.16 |

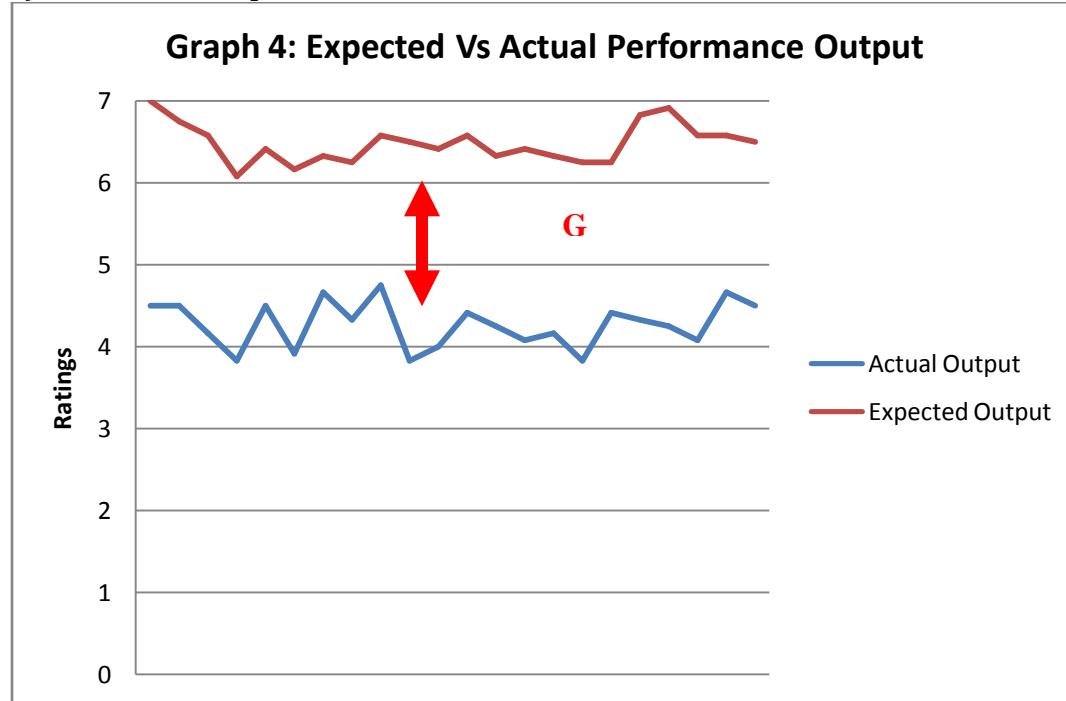
In most of the observation, the value of d is either less than 0.2 or 0.5 and none of the observation shows $d > 0.8$. Hence it implies that there is no difference in the views of industry-institute on performance of professional education. They strongly feel that there is an urgent need to revise the curriculum to keep up to the expectations of the industry.

The following graph shows the gap in the expectation of industry-institute from professional education:

a) Industry Viewpoint on Performance of Professional Education



The expected performance requirement was between 6 and 7 and the actual outcome is around 4.

b) Academia Viewpoint

The expected performance requirement was towards 7 and the actual outcome is around 4. Surprisingly, academicians also feels that there is a gap in the expected skill sets needed and actual skills possessed by professionals to perform good in industry.

Conclusion:

Both the stakeholders agree that the professional education plays an important role in nation building. The mismatch between the expected and actual skill set is a serious concern and need to be addressed immediately.

Findings and Conclusion

The performance of professional education plays an important role in the economy of any developing country. Changing economic conditions and intensification of global competition have given professional education an increasingly central role in the success of individuals and corporations. As discussed in literature review, one of the major reasons for unemployment in Saudi Arabia is the poor performance of education system. The research suggested the skills sets required for increasing employment while designing curriculum in Saudi Arabia. The researcher successfully conducted a gap analysis to find out the gap in the level of expectation of industry-institute from professional education. The major gap is observed in communication skill. The focus should be on first communication skills, behavioral skills and then on performance skills. The curriculum development team should work in close consultation with the industry.

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